



Celebrating the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition at TWU

FRIESEN. KLASSEN. THIESSEN. TOEWS. These are just some of the last names synonymous with the ethnic Mennonite tradition, one also known for pacifism, choral music, and, of course, delicious baked goods.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, approximately 12,000 Mennonites left the prairie provinces to set up communities in the Greater Vancouver and Fraser Valley areas, where large expanses of land provided opportunities for farming.

The west's mild climate and steady rain showers offered fertile ground, and sizeable plots of land made ideal spaces for homesteads. In the Fraser Valley, Mennonites were able to live in close-knit families and peacefully uphold their traditions.

It seems fitting, then, that the Anabaptist-Mennonite Centre for Faith and Learning (A-MCFL) was established at TWU, so close to a thriving Mennonite population. "It makes sense to have a Mennonite presence on campus that can be a resource for the large concentration of students who come from this tradition, as well as faculty, and the wider community," says Myron A. Penner, Ph.D., Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Director of the Centre.

According to Penner, Anabaptist-Mennonites have always been an active part of TWU. "Mennonites have been a part of nearly every facet of the University," he says. "They've been key contributors to the faculty, the University's Board of Governors, and are among some of the most generous donors."

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An initiative of the Mennonite Faith and Learning Society, a non-profit society that promotes Mennonite studies in higher education through the establishment of chairs and research centres at Canadian universities, the Centre is a point of connection between Trinity Western and the Lower Mainland's vibrant Anabaptist-Mennonite faith community.

Anabaptists were Christians of the 16th century European reformation who believed that baptism should be delayed until a confession of faith could be made. Mennonites, along with the Amish and the Hutterites, are direct descendants of the Anabaptist movement.

As a result of what were then considered to be radical views, many Anabaptists were persecuted by Protestants and Roman Catholics. “Anabaptists were seen as radicals for rejecting infant baptism and the comforts of state-run religion,” Penner says. “This was significant because during that time, church membership went hand-in-hand with state membership and political affiliation.”

The Centre has a promising future, having already held one event with renowned Mennonite author Rudy Wiebe, a two-time winner of the Governor General’s Award for fiction.

“The Centre embraces the voices—in the arts, sciences, or literature—that help us interpret and articulate the Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective, as well as what it means to integrate all of our experiences into a coherent faith journey,” Penner says. “A Christian university is the perfect place for these kinds of conversations to take place.”

In addition to launching the Centre, Penner, along with colleague Dennis Venema, Ph.D., are among 25 selected scholars from around the world who will take part in the Scholarship and Christianity in Oxford’s Bridging the Two Cultures of Science and Humanities seminars. The project, taking place in Oxford, England, over the next two summers, aims to develop interdisciplinary skills and understanding central to science and religion.

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